

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0920  
MARK DILLEN

JUNE 9, 1976

# SOVIET EMIGRATION

ANNCR:

AFTER TWO YEARS OF OVERALL DECLINE, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT EMIGRATION FROM THE SOVIET UNION MAY INCREASE SLIGHTLY THIS YEAR. HERE WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT IS VOA'S MARK DILLEN:

VOICE:

IN THE LATE SIXTIES AND EARLY SEVENTIES, AN INCREASING NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS WERE HEARD FROM SOVIET CITIZENS ON THEIR GOVERNMENT'S EMIGRATION POLICY. MOST OF THESE COMPLAINTS WERE FROM JEWS, MANY OF WHOM ADMIRER ISRAEL AND CONSIDERED LIFE THERE A BETTER ALTERNATIVE TO LIFE IN THE SOVIET UNION. THEY WANTED TO EMIGRATE, BUT THEY SAID THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT LET THEM LEAVE.

AS EAST-WEST DETENTE BLOSSOMED, HOWEVER, EMIGRATION FROM THE SOVIET UNION INCREASED DRAMATICALLY -- IN PARTICULAR, JEWISH EMIGRATION. FROM FOURTEEN THOUSAND IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-ONE, IT MORE THAN DOUBLED THE FOLLOWING YEAR, AND REACHED A RECORD TOTAL OF ALMOST THIRTY-FIVE THOUSAND IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE.

FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS, HOWEVER, TOTAL EMIGRATION EXPERIENCED AN EQUALLY PRECIPITOUS DECLINE. AND BY LAST YEAR, THE TOTAL WAS ONLY A LITTLE MORE THAN THIRTEEN THOUSAND.

THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT CONTENDS THAT THE BIG SHIFTS IN JEWISH EMIGRATION CORRESPOND TO SHIFTS IN THE NUMBER OF

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED. AND ONE SOVIET OFFICIAL HAS CLAIMED THAT LESS THAN TWO PER CENT OF EXIT VISA APPLICATIONS ARE TURNED DOWN.

HOWEVER, WESTERN ANALYSTS AND THOSE SOVIET CITIZENS WHO DO IN FACT LEAVE, SAY EMIGRATION IS TIGHTLY CONTROLLED, AND THAT IT FLUCTUATES ACCORDING TO THE VALUE PLACED BY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT ON IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH THE WEST.

THIS REASONING SUGGESTS THAT WESTERN INTEREST IN EASY EMIGRATION FOR SOVIET CITIZENS IS A CONTINUING CONSIDERATION -- AND INDEED, IN RECENT YEARS THE WEST HAS REPEATEDLY RAISED THE ISSUE. IN LATE NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE, THE U.S. CONGRESS VOTED TO WITHHOLD PREFERENTIAL TRADING TERMS WITH THE SOVIET UNION UNTIL IT ASSURED FREE EMIGRATION. THE SOVIET UNION THEN CANCELLED A TRADE AGREEMENT WITH THE UNITED STATES AND EMIGRATION TOTALS PLUMMETED.

IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE, WESTERN REPRESENTATIVES AT THE HELSINKI CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE PRESSED SUCCESSFULLY FOR INCLUSION OF PROVISIONS THAT WOULD COMMIT ALL THOSE SIGNING TO MAKE EMIGRATION FROM THEIR COUNTRIES EASIER. THE SOVIET UNION -- ONE OF THE SIGNATORIES -- RESPONDED THIS YEAR BY SLIGHTLY RELAXING ITS EMIGRATION RULES -- INCLUDING REDUCING THE EXIT FEE THAT STILL RUNS INTO HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS PER PERSON.

WHAT EFFECT -- IF ANY -- THE CHANGE IN SOVIET REGULATIONS HAS HAD ON THE PACE OF EMIGRATION IS NOT

CLEAR. HOWEVER, U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT FIGURES SHOW THE PACE HAS PICKED UP SOMEWHAT, WITH THE SOVIET UNION ALLOWING SOME FIVE THOUSAND PERSONS TO EMIGRATE TO ISRAEL AND SIX HUNDRED EIGHTY TO THE UNITED STATES IN THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF THIS YEAR.

MORE STRIKING IS THE CONTINUING FLOW OF ETHNIC GERMANS -- ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF THIS YEAR -- FROM THE SOVIET UNION TO WEST GERMANY. IF CONTINUED, THIS RECORD PACE WOULD EQUAL HALF THE EMIGRATION OF SOVIET JEWS EXPECTED THIS YEAR.

ONE OTHER FACTOR POINTS TO INCREASING NUMBERS OF NON-JEWISH EMIGRANTS FROM THE SOVIET UNION. STATE DEPARTMENT FIGURES FROM LAST YEAR SHOW ABOUT HALF THE TWELVE HUNDRED SOVIET EMIGRANTS COMING TO THE UNITED STATES WERE JEWS. SO FAR THIS YEAR, THE FIGURE IS ABOUT THIRTY FIVE PER CENT -- WITH A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ARMENIANS ALLOWED TO LEAVE THE SOVIET UNION FOR AMERICA.

GH/PBH